

Corui Chronicle

Journal of the American Society of Crows and Ravens Vol. XXII, No. 3, 2007 (C.E.)

CORVID BEHAVIOR

What are they doing?

The Fairbanks (Alaska) Daily News-Miner is a splendid source of corvid news, especially that which concerns ravens, a large, active population of whom is a major attraction of that community. For example, Dermot Cole, a News-Miner columnist, has written about a thought provoking incident reported by Don Lynch, a retired University of Alaska professor.

One morning in the winter last, Lynch came upon a raven sitting on a telephone pole. Around this bird and the pole 20 (Lynch estimated) other ravens were flying fast, in concentric circles, making an unusual racket. As Lynch described it: "They were so help me, keening, that is the wailing done by Irish women at a funeral. Then I looked down and at the foot of the pole lay a dead raven, wings outstretched. He must have flown into something, a very unusual act for a raven. This was, in my view, a raven funeral service, with the funeral director sitting on the top of the pole. At the end of the service they all flew away."

Lynch had never seen such a thing and via email, asked if any of his friends had. A retired naval officer responded that on a morning walk he had found about a hundred crows perched on light poles, in trees and

bushes, all of them cawing uproariously. "As I got closer I saw a dead crow on the side of the street. I started to walk toward it to get a better look and the din immediately became louder and the crows began to circle. Needless to say I got out of there fast. They were obviously lamenting the death and wanted no interference from me."

Over the years the Chronicle has received a dozen or so reports of similar, seemingly mourning crows or ravens. For example, the previous issue included an account of two such happenings, which occurred in Nigeria, by the author and Nobel Prize winner, Wole Soyinka. The descriptions of these incidents vary as to places and circumstances but are so alike in regards behavior that there is no good reason to doubt the occurrence of them. But what did occur? Were the birds conducting a funeral service as it immediately seemed they were to the observers? Or were their motives otherwise and unsentimental?

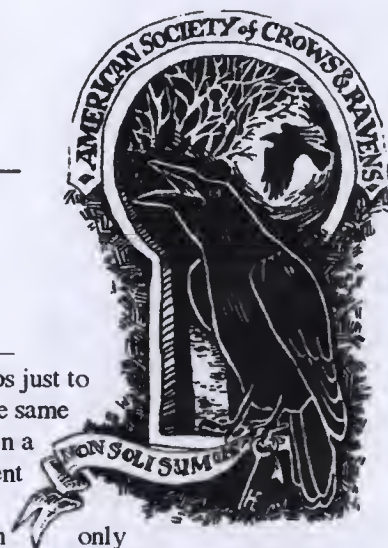
Before attempting to wrestle with questions of this sort it seems a short caveat is in order. The inner lives of other species are more mysterious for us than the surface of Mars. What we actually know about them is based almost entirely on circumstantial evidence since direct testimony cannot be taken. Further more – or

perhaps just to say the same thing in a different way – we can only describe what we observe, speculate and make judgments about it in our own parochial ways.

A purring cat rubbing against a person's leg, a dog repeatedly chasing a thrown ball, crows and ravens wailing over a dead one appear to be doing as people do when they display affection, are playing or are mourning. There is no reason not to name the behaviors after the human ones they resemble. But it should be kept in mind that their mental and emotional processes are very alien ones. Their behaviors and ours may be generally, somewhat or not at all analogous. The cat may be displaying rote, parasite-control behavior; and the dog sublimating hunting urges. And to get back to the crows and ravens. If they are not mourning – as it almost immediately strikes observers they are – then what else might they be doing?

An explanation which comes quickly to mind is that for a living crow or raven a dead one is simply carrion of which they consume a lot. Perhaps had the observer

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In memoriam

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Weekly World News ceased publication on Aug. 27, 2007. This informative and creative journal will be missed by many and inspired much, as for example, the following:

CHILDLESS MOM HATCHES THREE RAVENS

Never Leaves Sofa While Brooding Eggs
Supportive Hubby Feeds and Bathes

UFO CAPTIVE SAYS CREW

RESEMBLED GIANT CROWS
Wings Had Many Fingers, Opposable Thumbs
Beady Eyes; Used Long Beaks for Probing

VIRGIN LINGERIE MODEL

Lured by Noisy Crows
To Tryst with Bigfoot

TALKING RAVEN ADVISES ON IRAQ POLICY

Often Consulted by President, Others
Has High Security Perch at National Zoo

BILL O'REILLY HARASSED BY CROWS

Birds Defecate on FOX Commentator
Hand-Raised by Progressive Atheists/NBC

FLOCK OF SPACE RAVENS

Photographed by Astronauts
NASA Puzzled; Eager to Learn More

Continued on page 2



Arts & Literature



Many members of ASCAR paint, sculpt, write books and articles, are photographers and filmmakers and do these things so well that strangers pay them good money to do it. We have recently received mail from several who are in this line of work.

...DIANE THOMPSON is a print artist who does hand-carved, hand-printed linocut prints on



CROW VALLEY ARTS

heavily textured hand-painted and hand-made papers. Crows and ravens are often among her subjects. A hand for Diane. Address: Crow Valley Arts, 822

N.E. 81st St., Seattle WA 98115.

... JAMES BRADLEY is the author of *Crows and Ravens*, published as part of the Nature Walk series by Infobase Publishing, 132 W. 31st St., New York, NY 10001. As is the title this is a plain and simple book, a description which is not



intended and should not be taken as pejorative. It accurately offers basic information about the anatomy, behavior and ecology of crows and ravens. The intended audience is older children but intelligent

ones (without any Dr. Seuss stuff) of the sort who no doubt will become ASCAR members. For any age reader it makes a good bridge to heavier corvid literature.

... KOICHI KARASAWA 自然情報・親睦のコーナー is director of the Urban Bird society in Japan and author of articles and books on crows including a 2005 children's

book *The Wonder of Crows* illustrated by Tsuneo Taniuchi and published by Fukuinkan Shoten Publishers, Inc., Tokyo. Most of Karasawa's Website is appropriately in Japanese <http://www.zkk.ne.jp/~karasawa/u-bird.html>



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Operative cover

Biologists whose studies require hands-on work with living, wild animals – for measurement, tagging, radio-telemetry or other purposes – have found that crows and ravens are among the most difficult to capture once and even more difficult to capture a second time for re-examination. Among those recently frustrated in this regard are Babetta Marrone, a molecular biologist and Jeanne Fair, an ornithologist, both employed at the Los Alamos National Laboratory. They are interested in the resistance to and susceptibility of various birds to the West Nile virus. Their study species are domestic chickens, pigeons and ravens. The chickens are always available and the pigeons relatively easy to trap. But, writes Fair: "Ravens are the challenge of this project. They're smart. We use a compressed-air cannon to fire a net at the birds to catch them. The ravens don't like it, so they stay out of sight. They even remember what vehicle we were driving the last time we came to the landfill, so we have to change cars for each trip."

In consequence the collection of

raven data has lagged behind that of chickens and pigeons.

Crows soon became familiar with and avoided students attempting to catch them on the campus of the University of Washington in Seattle. In response, according to John Marzluff (a professor there and author of the excellent *In the Company of Crows and Ravens*) the researchers donned rubber masks. One of them represented a caveman (Geico-like) and the other Vice President Dick Cheney.

The crows apparently decided people with such faces were harmless. Then researchers all wearing caveman masks succeeded in trapping seven crows. Thereafter crows gave all the caveman-appearing students a wide berth. But when they put on their Dick Cheney masks the birds paid no special attention to, were not alarmed by them.

A moral can probably be drawn from this happening. But time presses here. Any reader who finds and describes it will receive a nice prize from us.

Memoriam continued

TERRORISTS RECRUIT AFGHAN RAVENS

To Pilfer U.S. Gold,
Fort Knox Losses Heavy, Says FBI

SAME SEX CROW COUPLES COMMON, QUITE HAPPY

Reported by Many Blue State Observers
Kansas Birders Deny Practice, Seek Ban

MANY CHINESE CROWS DIE IN FOOD TESTS

Given Cookies, Cakes, Cheese Products
Popular with American Children

BOY RAISED IN LARGE RAVEN'S NEST

Prosperes as Eco-Developer
Offers Up-scale Retreats in Tall Pines

POT SMOKING CROWS DISTURB CALIFORNIA BEACHES

Attack Sun-bathing Beauties
Steal Bikinis – Tops and Bottoms

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE EATS SOME CROW

Small Portion Before Televised Debates
Family Superstition and Flatulence Cure

RAVENS NOW OVER-FLY U.S. BORDER FENCE

Steal Identities of Americans; Give to Aliens
Birds Protected by Armed Environmentalists

CORVID BEHAVIOR *continued from page 1**Understanding our observations*

come on them more surreptitiously or later he or she might have found the funeral party was in fact a cannibalistic one. But in a note on the subject, Bernd Heinrich, who has probably spent more time watching ravens and thinking about them than any other North American zoologist, writes: "One thing is certain. They don't come together to scavenge on the dead. Indeed, my ravens will scavenge anything – but never a big black bird." (As an aside: Heinrich and Thomas Bugnyar are co-authors of an article, "Just How Intelligent are Ravens," which appeared in the April issue of *Scientific American*.

If they have not already, ASCAR members should read this piece. It focuses on what might be called contemplative intelligence as distinguished from rote intelligence.)

I have seen a good many dead crows, the remains of ones killed by predators, gunners or – presumably by disease. But like Heinrich with the ravens I have never seen evidence of cannibalism. Nor have I heard of any even during the past few years when unusual numbers of dead crows have been found by others because of the West Nile virus. (I have also never personally observed the "mourning" behavior but have no doubt that others have.)

Another possibility is: When in the clutches of a predator or when having been captured and hung out as a lure by gunners, crows utter terror calls or shrieks that will draw other crows to the scene. These shrieks are intensified versions of calls used by crows when gathering to mob potential enemies. Perhaps if the observer of a corvid funeral had approached a few minutes earlier she or he would have found instead of a dead bird one in extremis. I know of no reports that make mention of how long the defunct bird appeared to have been dead.



Basic Instinct II pastel by Judith Gebhard Smith, Nightwing Studios, Seattle, Wash. Printed with artist's permission.

As preeminent hunter gathers, corvids like people are naturally much excited by new, unusual and unexpected things; always investigating to determine if they are or are not exploitable, safe or dangerous. As Dr. Lynch, the Fairbanks observer, rightly noted it is rare to find the body of a corvid that has been struck by a car or truck or has killed him or herself by flying into a building or a window. Perhaps what seems to be mourning behavior is simply an expression of insatiable curiosity. The birds gather around the new odd thing one of them has spotted, and discuss it – an expression. After determining that it is a big, dead black bird in which they have (because of innate, evolved taboos) no consumptive interest, they fly off to take care of other business.

Now to work the other side of the street, the one where they make old saws such as: "If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it may be a duck."

As has been well demonstrated by both field and lab researchers, crows and ravens possess a deliberative intelligence, have good memories, are exceptionally communicative, generally sociable and that

often individual birds form lasting relationships, some mate more or less for life and there are family groups in which a mated pair, adults but non-breeding and juvenile birds stay together for several years.

Given these attributes it seems at least possible that corvids regard death as a large serious happening and they grieve ceremoniously when a companion is irrevocably lost. But even if they do, their mourning behavior is so seldom observed as to suggest that it is not a rote, innate response as say hibernation is for woodchucks or migration for warblers. Perhaps all corvids can feel sorrow and mourn but only some do. This too is possible, not entirely fantastic.

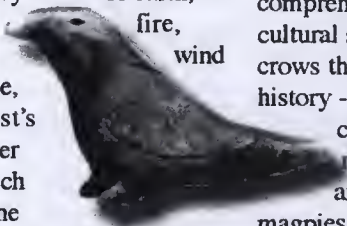
As Lawrence Kilham and others have concluded, corvids like people have what we call a culture, i.e. a body of acquired knowledge, habits, behaviors and shibboleths which one generation learns of from preceding ones. But as with human culture that of the corvids is not

homogeneous and static. It differs greatly from place to place and from time to time, is always in flux. The now famous New Caledonian crows make tools. Other crows with seemingly the same innate abilities apparently have no need or inclination to do so. Researchers have found that communities of crows -- some of them only a few miles apart -- have idiosyncratically modified common crow calls, i.e. developed what amounts to their own accents and dialects. Crows who regularly associate (as some sometimes do) with other birds, gulls, starlings, grackles and the like, respond to, may mimic, the calls of these species. But crows who keep more to themselves, are less cosmopolitan, do not.

Conceivably: for cultural reasons some crows -- so it appears to us -- mourn their dead and hold funerals, but for cultural reasons most of them do not. Perhaps we are, always have been so fascinated with other bloods because they are constant, close-by reminders that we live in a universe of vast mystery which is what keeps us coming and going. — *Bil Gilbert, Augusta, Mich.*

Arts & Literature *continued*

... RUTH APTER is a raku artist specializing in animal sculptures in the tradition of Southwest fetishes and Inuit sculpture. She says, "Raku is exciting to produce. It is dangerous. It is elemental. The interplay of earth, water, fire, smoke, and chance, a raku artist's dance." Her work, which includes the raven seen here, as well as horses, bears, turtles, frogs and dogs and many other animals can be seen online <http://www.100horsesraku.com/>



... MAY LATTANZIO LENZER, freelance writer and photographer is author of an out-of-print book *Waltz on the Wild Side - An Animal Lover's Journal*. In this issue of the Chronicle, she shares a story of Orville the raven who was the subject of two stories in her book.

... MARK BEHME is a Silver Spring, Md., sculptor. One of his recent works, "Crow MAGUS," is a thought provoking more or less out of this world piece, which thwarts description and should be seen. It can be, on Mark's

Website: www.markbehme.com and in the center here.

And from previous recent issues

... BORJA SAX's *Crows* is a vest pocket-sized comprehensive cultural survey of crows throughout history - covering crows, ravens and

magpies in art, literature, legend and film. The publisher is Reaktion Books Ltd., 33 Great Sutton St., London EC1V 1071. More information is online at www.reaktion-books.co.uk

... JOYCE HAYNES, an illustrator who sets pancakes out for crows at her studio, McDonald County Press, P.O. Box 266, Pineville, Mo. 64856 Her Website is www.press-info.com/roux

... CELIA PRICE, artist whose raven observations inspired her watercolors and The Burd

design for cards. Her office address is 62901 Bell Springs Rd. Garberville, CA

... JUDITH GEBHARD SMITH, Nightwing Studio, is a print-maker who found her niche as a pastellist some years ago and whose fascination with crows and ravens has inspired much of her work. She has shared her work with ASCAR in recent issues, including this one. See page 3. Her Website is www.nightwingstudio.com and mailing address is Nightwing Studio, 2045 57th Way NW, Olympia, WA 98502.

... EVON ZERBETZ, is the whimsical Ketchikan, Alaska, artist who has generously allowed the Chronicle to reproduce some of her linocuts of crows and ravens. In addition to printmaking and notecards, many Chronicle readers know that Zerbetz also is an accomplished illustrator of children's books, the most recent being *Ten Rowdy Ravens*. Her Website is www.evonzerbetz.com and her studio address is Evon Zerbetz Graphics, P.O. Box 8943, Ketchikan, AK 99901.

95542 or celia@thes-ticks.net.

... CANDACE SAVAGE, *Crows: Encounters with the Wiseguys*, Greystone Books, 2005; #201 - 2323 Quebec St., Vancouver, BC V5T4S7.



The *Corvi Chronicle* is published irregularly by corvi who have an interest in or need for doing so for members of The American Society of Crows and Ravens and others. There is no subscription fee, but it is customary and seemly to send contributions to pay for production and mailing. There is a direct connection between contributions, the size of the Chronicle and its frequency of distribution. Those who do not choose to contribute will continue to receive the Chronicle and enjoy all membership privileges. However, they will no doubt suffer a loss of self-esteem and may occasionally be mocked by other corvis.

Members are reminded to make new corvi by duplicating and passing along issues of the Chronicle.

ASCAR has a home page or chat room on the Internet:

<http://www.ascaronline.org/>

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Art Directors Corvi #005, #8, #30, #48 and #1492
The Board Known only to themselves

The Chronicle accepts articles and manuscripts of reasonable length on any topic acknowledged by The Board, news clippings and general correspondence. Unused material will be returned in good time to the authors. Commentary (insightful, indignant or otherwise) should be addressed to:

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KAW RIVER VALLEY ROOST
Box 1423
Lawrence KS 66044-8423



THE TALK OF THE ROOST

RAVENS ALERT RESCUERS

An Associated Press report from Baker City, Ore., published in the Sept. 7, 2007, Daily Astorian notes that ravens helped in finding a 76-year-old woman who had been missing for 13 days in the Wallowa Mountains in northeast Oregon.

A Baker County sheriff's deputy and an Oregon State Police Trooper had continued a search for the missing woman while off duty. The AP report says they had returned to a steep brushy canyon off a Forest Service road that they believed may not have been searched thoroughly.

"What alerted us was birds; we heard ravens," the sheriff's deputy said. Next they heard a faint child-like voice that led them to the woman who was dehydrated, suffering from frostbite and thought to have suffered a hip injury.

A later report found in The Portland Oregonian provided more details about the woman's ordeal but no reference to the ravens. The Oregonian referred to her as "the Northwest's toughest grandmother." She had become lost on while on an elk hunting trip with her husband in the Eagle Cap Wilderness Area. Two mishaps set the couple's ordeal in motion. Her husband had broken his wrist trying to load his ATV onto their trailer and then their SUV became stuck on a steep forest road. The couple left their SUV on Aug. 24 to walk for help. She had grown tired and turned back to return to the SUV. Her husband found help but authorities could not find his wife once he directed them to

the SUV. She told reporters she believes she set out to find help for her husband the next day but has no memory of spending the night in the SUV. She was found on Sept. 6. Submitted by Corvi 85, Astoria, Ore.

ORVILLE

I just got around to reading Vol. XXII, No. 2. ...I enjoyed the anecdote about George Schaller and his wife - the man bellowing for a raven to feed from his hand.

Let me tell you a story...

We lived in Antelope Acres, Calif., in the high desert when I made the acquaintance of a bird lady, Alice, who never turned away an animal in need, as her life was wildlife. She had a little green house in a yard that was alive with the recuperated residents who could leave and chose not to, or the permanently injured who had to stay.

I found a young raven at the side of the road - the pavement was a griddle in August. No nest, no parents, and it was severely dehydrated. That's how I met Alice, and that's how I came to begin the rehabilitation of ravens. The first was Jekyll, who survived, and then disappeared one night when we decided she was old enough to be alone.

The elm trees provided thick shelter. She would be fine. We were wrong because we didn't listen to her desperate protestations. She disappeared that night. We never found her body. She was well flighted, behaving as a raven, but still

- we have never forgotten her and still wonder what became of her. I remember that with guilt and shame. How much I had to learn!

No. 2 raven came to me as a nestling around the time of my birthday in May. He had almost no pinfeathers, so he was very young. I raised him to adulthood. It came time to move a few miles away to Quartz Hill. We were very apprehensive that ... he would fly back to ... Antelope Acres. Orville loved us so much, he circled the [new] house twice and came inside. He knew he was home. He loved riding in my big, blue Chevy station wagon. It felt like a land yacht, it was so big. He would follow me to the grocery store, flying. He'd be a speck in the sky. I'd come out with my groceries, put them in the car, and call him. "Orville, come on! We're going home," I would shout to the sky. I would tap my forearm, to the gaping surprise of spectators whom I knew thought I was certifiably nuts who would inevitably gather. But there he would come, spiraling down, the speck growing in size as he came closer. He would put on the brakes about three feet above my arm, settle gently, give his wings a little flip, give me a nuzzle, hop onto the back of the front seat, and we'd go home. He took great pleasure in being taken for rides. If he followed, I could always call him down if I thought it was too far for him.

He was a most remarkable bird. Two of his stories are in my now out-of-print

Continued on page 7

ROOST NOTES

Bird feeder dramas

The following crow observations were sent by the Eagles Mere, Pa., corvi whose childhood memory of "Joe the Crow" appeared in the previous issue.

FIVE NOTE CAW

I've loved crows and ravens ever since I was a child. My husband and I have retired to a rural mountainous area in north central Pennsylvania where both species have thriving populations. I'm in the habit of saving table scraps for our resident crows. When there are leftovers, I spread them on a large boulder outside my kitchen window early in the morning and delight in watching crow antics.

There are four, obvious relatives, who respond quickly to my special five-note call on the mornings when I have something for them. Although I'm trying to imitate their caws, I almost never hear five successive notes in the wild. It's my "come and get it" call. Only occasionally will one of the sentry birds (I'm convinced they cruise by to check on what's for breakfast) call to me using five notes. This sometimes happens when they spot me outside the house after dawn but before I've had a chance to put out the buffet.

Despite what I'm convinced are conversations between the crows and me, they remain very wary and sometimes take flight at something as simple as my movements at the kitchen window. I don't believe I've in any way tamed them and that pleases me.

On two occasions, several years apart, there has been a bit of drama at the bird feeder. I feed other birds as well, but the crows are my special favorites and only they get table scraps.

The first incident occurred in late-morning. A blue jay was seized in mid-air by a hawk right outside our back window. What followed was so rapid, chaotic, and noisy that I, who am not on a first name basis with raptors, never did identify what kind of hawk it was. However, he had no sooner pinned the blue jay to the ground than he was surrounded by four crows. They circled him. I swear they stood on tiptoe, all puffed out and threatening. They made themselves huge, and then they slowly, in what looked like orchestrated movement, began to close in on the hawk, as if they were tightening a noose around him.

Given my deep affection for crows, I was quick to ascribe to them only the most pure of motives. There may have been too much excitement for me to look for identifying features on the hawk, but I still had time to think to myself, "How brave. They are rescuing their cousin from the talons of this murderous hawk."

Not so. As they closed in on the hawk, he grew frightened and flew off. The poor bedraggled blue jay was still alive, although looking much the worse for the wear. He also managed to fly – into a nearby, tightly packed grove of young beech trees. The crows followed in hot pursuit, and even I had to admit that it was dinner, not rescue, that was on their minds. The jay, however, was clever and wedged himself so tightly against the slender trunk of the beech that the crows could not get to him

for the tangle of branches. They hassled him for about 10 minutes before giving up and flying off. The blue jay eventually did the same.

The second incident happened just this year and, once again, involved a hawk. This time the action occurred directly under the bird feeder. I didn't see this particular hawk, also unidentified, seize his prey, but I was drawn to my kitchen window by a sudden, wild cacophony of corvi hollering and cawing. Again four crows were after a hawk who had pinned a slate-colored junco to the ground. This time the crows were actually on top of the hawk, clawing him and pulling at his feathers with their beaks. All the while, dozens of crows had gathered in the nearby treetops and were cheering the carnage on. No longer able to nurture illusions about a potential rescue, I understood I was about to witness a murder. These crows were out to kill that hawk. I'm not a good naturalist, can't just stand by and watch something get slaughtered. Without thinking, I burst out of the house yelling, "Hey! What's going on out here?"

The crows took flight; the hawk took flight; amazingly even the little junco was still alive. The four would-be assassins took after that hawk, as did the entire treetop audience. They chased it into a slippery elm on the other side of our house. The hawk landed on a high branch. The crows gathered around it, in a scolding face-off. Since they were too high in the tree for me to get a good look, I ran for my binoculars, determined to identify the hawk. When I opened the door to our upstairs porch, the hawk flew away, with the crows following in their usual harassing way, but no more direct attacks were observed.

My friends who love songbirds as much as I love crows scold me for defending these robbers of songbird nests. My response is that "my" crows have an acquired taste for spaghetti [leftovers] that may actually save robin lives. However, the line is delivered without much conviction. That said, the two episodes with hawks make me wonder if the vigilante band of crows might be the reason my bird feeder is almost never troubled by raptors. If true, I can't attribute this to any inherent altruism on the crows' part. They are also there for the kill, and if their presence is a deterrent, that is purely an unintended consequence of their basic self-interest.

FEBRUARY RAVENS

I'm an avid cross-country skier who is fortunate to have a lovely forest trail at my doorstep. I enjoy skiing alone in the early morning. One of the reliable thrills of skiing in February is conversations with ravens. They call. I answer, fooling no one I'm sure. I think they are playing with me, just as I am playing with them. The woods are deep and I rarely see them in flight, just hear them. We talk back and forth, and all is right with my world. Once when I stopped to scrape an accumulation of ice from my skis, a low "quork" just above my head froze all my movements as surely as if a spell had been



ROOST NOTES *continued*

Teaching tool?

cast. Knowing how wary these birds are, I didn't want to even turn to look up and see who was doing the talking. I just stood there, waiting. Finally he flew off, and in the stillness of the forest, I could hear the steady whooseh, whoosh from the down-drafts of his wings. I swear I felt the air around me move. And people wonder why I love these birds.

SUMMER 2007

As previously reported, I feed our local crow population table scraps on a large rock outside our kitchen window. This is an irregular morning ritual, the frequency based on the number of leftovers from the previous night's meal. When I have something that appeals to their palates, I call them in using a five-note call.

One morning there was such a demanding cacophony of caws that I dropped everything and hurried out to ready the feast. They'd never before made this kind of demand. Occasionally, a sentry bird, on seeing me outside before breakfast has been served, will caw to me as if trying to hurry the process along. But this insistent cawing was something new.

As I was sweeping off the rock, I was puzzled to find the bone from an old T-bone steak right in the middle of the flat surface. We'll put fresh steak bones out, but this one was at least a couple of years old and caked with mud. I picked it up and dropped it beside the rock, shaking my head at the presumed folly of my husband, a city boy, to think that crows would find any appeal in such a dried-out specimen.

Gene quickly denied any role in the placement of the mysterious bone. Meanwhile, the crows plummeted nimbly to snatch up my improvised breakfast of fresh-from-the-package sliced up hotdogs. There had been no leftovers available that morning. It

was pretty quickly clear to me that the reason for all the ruckus was that the parent crows had brought their fledglings in to show them the panhandling ropes.

On a normal morning, crows fly in from all directions and tolerate each other well. I have what I call the Northern Tribe, the Western Tribe and the Southern Tribe, named for the direction of their approach. They seem to take turns eating. Usually only one at a time occupies the surface of the rock. The others wait on the ground or lined up on low-hanging branches. The bird at the trough takes as much as it can carry in one flight. It's fun to observe their skill at really loading up a beak. As soon as one bird flies off with its haul, another one hops up on the rock and begins gathering as much as possible.

But on this particularly morning only the Western Tribe was allowed near the rock. As soon as a bird from one of the other clans flew in, the Westerns chased it off with loud, aggressive cawing. The feeding was over pretty quickly. As I watched and as my understanding of what was happening – fledglings being show a food source – grew, I decided that the bone had been a kind of an exchange. "Maybe they brought a gift so that I would show 'the kids' safe haven."

With that in mind, I waited until the last crow had flown off and then, not wanting to show a lack of appreciation went out to retrieve the "gift." Guess what? It was gone. The crows had taken it with them. Gift, indeed! I suspect it was a teaching tool. What do you and your readers think? Has anyone heard of crows leading their fledglings to a food source using a decoy bit of food? Although muddy and old as this bone was, it could hardly be called food.

book, *Waltz on the Wild Side - An Animal Lover's Journal*.

Orville left as an adult during a terrible high-desert snowstorm, and I was horrified. I just knew he would die in the cold. He used to roost on a door in the living room. This night it was empty. But in the morning, he was sitting in tree over the corral, showering me with snow as I fed the donkey and the goat. He brought all the neighborhood ravens to eat, for they couldn't find anything at all in snow three feet deep, and I threw food up on the roof over the kitchen for the flock. He mated and in the spring would bring his mate and the babies, string them along the telephone wires and come down to visit with me. And one day he sat on the corral gate. We had a conversation. He was saying goodbye. One more nuzzle, one more kiss, and he was gone. I saw him, but never was able to stroke him again. He

TALK *continued*

had other responsibilities.

My neighbor, now an old man if he's still alive, kept an eye on him for years and Orville is still there, as far as I know, somewhere in Quartz Hill.

I had high hopes of befriending a crow, for they live here in northwest Florida, but I've never been able to come to one's aid. However, I am ever hopeful, and here if they need me. You don't see many bodies along the road - I think they have it quite good here. We live at the edge of a cypress swamp, and they congregate down at the bridge in the trees, two blocks away.

I do not have a corvid name, but I would love to be known as Orville's Mother.

ANNA THE BOY CROW

I first contacted you about the crow I had rescued on 9/12/2001, with a broken wing. I had lots of questions... So I figured it was time to update you on how we are doing.

Some of the questions I asked dealt with how to clip Anna's nails and how to tell if Anna was an Anna or an Anakin (a boy crow, that is). You did give me some good advice about wrapping Anna in a sweater before clipping the nails. We however, have worked out a different solution. Namely, I sneak up and get a few nails at a time before I get nipped! It's time consuming, but works as a fine game for Anna.

I had read in one of the Chronicle articles about crows liking dairy products. I too have found that Anna likes cheese! I don't give him much, but he gobbles-up

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CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

March 7 2007

Thanks for your work with the Corvi Chronicle. I look forward to every issue and they bring me laughs and insight into the lives and thinking of crows.

As a kid we got a pet crow every spring. They would stay with us as a part of the family until early fall when they would join up with a flock of wild birds and migrate. Sometimes we would see a crow approach the house the next spring but never tame as before. Luckily I have a neighborhood filled with crows and am still able to enjoy their antics. Thanks again for making such a great publication possible! — *Raven 14, the German, Salem, Ore.*

OUTSMARTING SEA GULLS

July 31, 2007

I have been a member of ASCAR for several years and enjoy reading the Corvi Chronicle each time I receive it. My wife and I live on an inlet of the Atlantic on the eastern shore of Nova Scotia and we are both nature lovers. We especially enjoy and appreciate all the wild birds along the coast and have bird feeders on our property. Our friends the local crows and ravens also get many treats from us in the form of left over foods. It's so interesting to sometimes see them outsmart the seagulls who outnumber them when food is put out. They are so clever and I can understand why crows and



Illustration by Jim Haynes

LETTERS

ravens are considered the smartest, most intelligent of all the bird species.

I am enclosing an article from The Chronicle Herald of Halifax that was recently published. Perhaps you can use it in the Journal of ASCAR.

As I have been a member of ASCAR for several [years] I am curious as to why I have never been assigned a number. What does one have to do to be so honoured? — *Corvi #731, Musquodoboit Harbour, Nova Scotia, Canada*

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Undated Halifax Chronicle Herald story by Brian Medel, Yarmouth Bureau, was headlined: "You can call him the bird whisperer: West Pubnico man finds that crow now won't leave." The crow is known as Mater, which rhymes with to-mater, the first food he accepted from the family who found him in a wooded area not flying. Although the family feels Mater can fly, he prefers to hop, run and chase the family's ducks.]

CROW MAGIC

Just at the (nearly) end of a very long winter, I realized that I'd not see your periodical in the mail. Two days later, there it was! Crow magic, I guess. ... My kid's nightshirt is old, holey and too small. Are you still selling crow T-shirts? — *Crow woman #88, Bucksport, Maine*

YOUNG RESEARCHER

Lately I have taken an interest in Crows and Ravens. When I was doing research I came across a link to your Website. I believe that your idea is very good and am writing to join you. When accepted I will do much to spread the word about these magnificent creatures. My reason for joining would be that I feel I could do research contribute not only factual but also how crows and ravens appear in mythology. I am currently a junior in school and would be able to arouse some interest.

I prefer to keep my real name to myself but I would like to go by The Fool on the Hill. So when I write to you guys again

this is what I will go by.

Enclosed is a small donation that I hope can be of some use to further the cause.

May the Crow and Raven fly forever.
— *Corvi The Fool on the Hill, Highlands Ranch, Colo.*

FORCE OF GRAVITY

I saw an interesting Corvid activity the other day. I was walking along the riverfront near where I live in Astoria, Ore., the tide was out and the mud flats were exposed. The exposed mud flats provided the crows with a place to hunt for things to eat. One industrious crow found a small clam in the mud. The crow flew up onto the street, with the clam in his beak, then "threw" the clam down onto the pavement. He repeated this act numerous times without success. Finally, the crow flew up to about 10 feet over the street and again threw the clam onto the pavement. This time the clam broke open, the crow landed and finished his meal. I thought it was remarkable that the crow figured out that he needed to be higher above the pavement to get more force on his throw to break the clam. It was fascinating to watch this intelligent creature at work. — *Corvid 85, Astoria, Ore.*

Privacy act

ASCAR now numbers — so think some who enjoy counting things — about 900 members. Alphabetically and in terms of interests and attitudes members range — an expression — from academics to Zoroastrians. But only the Editor and an associate minion know who and where they all are. This is in keeping with the Corvi Privacy Act that forbids those who know from talking about or to other corvis or using their names and addresses in the Chronicle without permission. The CPA is occasionally tested by purveyors of crow curios wanting access to mailing lists.

However, because many members have similar interests and have indicated a desire to make the acquaintance of others who share them, some thought has been given to adjusting the CPA to accommodate these wishes. Therefore anyone who would like to hear from other corvi should send along their name and address to the editor. These will be published occasionally in the Chronicle. Names are not absolutely necessary — Corvi numbers will do — but addresses are. Obviously those who wish to remain known only to the editor and her associate minion should do nothing and will continue to enjoy the protection of CPA.



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TALK *continued*

what I do give him. Then in your latest issue there was a mention of a crow liking a vast amount of varied types of foods, over [600] types? Wow. I do try to bring variety to Anna's diet. However the only fruit he likes is watermelon.

You also mentioned that it's almost impossible to tell boys from girls, unless the crow lays an egg. Well, we are approaching six years together and still no eggs. That was my first clue. My next clue came last spring (2006). I was about to pet Anna when all of a sudden HE jumped on my arm and had his way with me. I was wearing a long sleeve black sweatshirt at the time. At first I thought he was attacking my sleeve because it was black and he mistook me for another crow! However during mating season I have heard similar noises coming from mating pairs that sounded much like the noises that Anna was making. After about a month, Anna quit jumping on my arm. This spring he again claimed me his mate, so I'm pretty sure Anna is a boy crow and quite the lover!!!

Besides the spring thing, we have developed a very caring relationship. He still can't fly and probably never will, so he lives in a large macaw cage in my office. The office windows are at the level of the tree canopy since my home is on a hill. Anna has a great view of the surroundings and a view into the living room from the French door. He gets lots of attention from both myself and my husband and is currently sharing the office with one of our cats, Cosmaux. They both seem to like the company of each other, of course from the safety (for both) of Anna's cage.

Over the last 15 years, I have had the honor of crows and ravens coming into my life and

either foster raising or rehabbing them. I would never have thought of keeping one of these wonderful wild creatures as a pet. Anna's circumstances are different. He can't fly. As a result ... we have become companions and my life has been enriched. When Anna comes out of his cage, which isn't that often, he follows me around the house The cats stay clear of him because he IS a big black bird with a big black beak, and has been known to chase them. He loves to go over to the cat food bowls and help himself to their food. If I put a pan of water on the floor, he checks it out carefully then takes a joyous bath. I get the pleasure of cleaning up all the mess. He's a bird therefore he poops a lot. I am glad he is happier to be in his cage rather than pooping all over the house!

They say that crows are the harbinger of change. This sounds true to me. Since Anna has come into my life much change has occurred, indeed. Many changes for the better and some that are hard to bear. In the last two years I have lost both my parents, two cats, five koi fish and a cousin. I also left my home of 25 years to move in with my husband. My 25-year career in the entertainment biz has transcended into a full-time college faculty position. I am usually not great with change, but in a way Anna has taught me that change just is. He too has had to endure and transcend. And he has done this magnificently. Anna has found a way to embrace his new life as a non-flying indoor crow.

So in closing this Anna update, I want to thank you and all the contributors to the Corvi Chronicle, and let you know we are doing fine. — Corvi 912 & Anna the Crow, West Hollywood, Calif.

RAVENS IN ANTIQUITY

Passage in time

True or false the story runs that the *Zend Avesta*, from which the following is an excerpt, was once engraved in letters of gold on an ox hide by the ancient Medes, Persians or Iranians as they like to be called. Alexander, the so-called Great, did not care for their work and being a practicing barbarian,

had it destroyed. Later the *Zend Avesta* was retrieved or recalled and printed on ordinary paper. The following is from a translation by one James Darmsetter. The moral of this passage is, of course, that corvids have attracted attention, been conversation pieces for us for quite some time.

18. We sacrifice unto Verethraghna, made by Ahura.

Zarathustra asked Ahura Mazda: 'Ahura Mazda, most beneficent Spirit, Maker of the material world, thou Holy One!

'Who is the best-armed of the heavenly gods?

Ahura Mazda answered: 'It is Verethraghna, made by Ahura, O Spitama Zarathustra!

19. Verethraghna, made by Ahura, came to him the seventh time, running in the shape of a raven that ...¹ below and ...¹ above, and that is the swiftest of all birds, the lightest of the flying creatures.

20. He alone of living things, -- he or none, -- overtakes the flight of an arrow, however well it has been shot. He flies up joyfully at the first break of dawn, wishing the night to be no more, wishing the dawn, that has not yet come, to come.²

21. He grazes the hidden ways³ of the mountains, he grazes the tops of the mountains, he grazes the depths of the vales, he grazes the summits⁴ of the trees, listening to the voices of the birds.

